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Conflict, Caste, and Resolution: A Quantitative Analysis for Indian Villages

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1. Introduction

The contextual background to this paper book is the division of Hindu society in India into a number of caste groups. The caste system in India stratifies Hindus, who constitute 80% of India's population, into mutually exclusive caste groups, membership of which is determined entirely by birth. Very broadly, one can think of four subgroups: *brahmins*; *kshatriyas*; *vaisyas*; and *sudras*.[1] Brahmins, who were traditionally priests and teachers, represent the highest caste; *Kshatriyas* (traditionally, warriors and rulers) and *Vaisyas* (traditionally, moneylenders and traders) are 'high caste' (or equivalently, 'forward' or 'upper' caste or, as they are sometimes termed, 'twice born') Hindus; [2] the *Sudras* (traditionally performing menial jobs) constitute the 'other backward classes' (OBC). [3] Then there are those persons (mostly Hindu, but some who have converted to Buddhism or Christianity) whom Hindus belonging to the four caste groups (listed above) regard as being outside the caste system because they are 'untouchable' in the sense that physical contact with them - most usually the acceptance of food or water - is polluting or unclean.[4] Articles 341 and 342 of the Indian constitution include a list of castes entitled to special benefits and all those groups included in this list – and subsequent modifications to this list – are referred to as, respectively, 'Scheduled Castes'. The term 'Scheduled Castes' (hereafter abbreviated to *SC*) is, for all practical purposes, synonymous with the former 'untouchable' castes. Persons from the *SC* are often also referred to as *Dalits* (meaning 'broken' or 'oppressed').

Exacerbating the social ostracism of the *SC* is the fact that they are among the poorest and most backward of India's population. A combination of social ostracism and extreme poverty means that many persons from the *SC*, particularly in rural India, live in circumstances which are both physically harsh and psychologically humiliating and in which they are denied even the most basic

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[1] These four castes are said to have come from Brahma's mouth (*brahmin*), arms (*kshatriya*), thighs (*bania*) and feet (*sudra*). This is termed the *Purusasukta* legend which appears in an appendix to the *Rig Veda*.

[2] However, confusingly, *vaisyas* are 'forward' in some states (Uttar Pradesh) but 'backward' in others (Bihar).

[3] The term "other" signifies "in addition to those who are 'outcastes'" (see below). There is an important distinction within the OBC between those who are just 'backward' (*Yadavs*, *Kurmis*, *Lodh*, many members of these sub-castes being traditional land-owners), those who are 'more backward' castes', and those whose are 'most backward' (*Saini*, *Prajapati*, *Pal*, whose degree of dispossession bears comparison to that of the 'untouchable' group).

[4] Stemming largely from the fact that, in occupational terms, they performed – and continue to perform - the dirtiest and lowliest of tasks: burials and disposal of carcasses; scavenging; the removal of excreta.

human rights. For example, they are routinely: denied access to wells used by caste Hindus; prohibited from entering Hindu temples and from participating in village festivals; forced to live in settlements segregated from the main village, located in its most insalubrious outskirts. They are almost always landless and have to eke out a living either as wage or bonded labourers to caste Hindu masters, or by performing menial services like scavenging and disposing of human and animal carcasses.[5] Overlaying the oppressive nature of the circumstances in which many Dalits in India live, is the constant threat of violence from caste Hindus. Much of this violence is visited upon Dalit women. The upper-caste practice of raping Dalit women or parading them naked through a village if they are seen as "getting above themselves" is fairly commonplace (Sainath, 2002).

However, deprivation and destitution are not the sole prerogative of the SC. There is an important distinction within the OBC between those who are 'backward' (*Yadavs*, *Kurmis*, *Lodh*, many members of these sub-castes being traditional land-owners), and those who are *most* 'backward'. The degree of dispossession of the last group (*Saini*, *Prajapati*, *Pal)* bears comparison to that of the SC though, of course, they do not have the stigma of 'untouchability' imposed on the *SC*.

Against this background, there are several reasons for tension between castes in Indian villages. Sometimes this tension stems from the untouchability issue and manifests itself in disputes between the 'upper castes' and the *SC* over the use of common property resources like water and grazing land[6] and sometimes over the ownership of land.[7] Another source of friction is resentment by the SC at the refusal to them, by the upper castes, of certain types of employment which violate pollution norms (like domestic work, particularly involving cooking and handling food). Sometimes inter-caste tension is between the OBC - and particularly, its most backward component – and the *SC*. This derives from the fact that the both groups live at the margins of economic life and compete for scarce resources. It also derives from the fact that the most backward classes are jealous of their non-

[5] See Borooah (2005) for measures of the deprivation of the *SC* and see *inter alia* Gupta (2000) for details of the Indian caste system.

[6] For example the Guardian newspaper reported how a teen aged SC boy was killed by upper caste men when one of his goats strayed on to land to which they claimed possession ("Lynching of boy illustrates how the curse of caste still blights India", 19 October 2014).

[7] For example, the Hindustan Times newspaper reported that four persons from the *SC* had been killed in Rajasthan when *Jats* (a dominant caste) had used tractors to flatten *SC* homes over a land dispute. (*Dalits* killed in dispute over land, 17 May 2015)

polluting status vis-a-vis the SC and are keen on demonstrating their 'superior' status by distancing themselves socially from the *SC*, particularly in relation to marriage. It is no accident that some of the most egregious instances of caste violence in India have been prompted by *SC* men eloping with non-*SC* women.[8]

As a result of these factors one of the features of contemporary Indian life, particularly in rural areas where a person's caste identity is known to all, is 'caste-based conflict': this often, takes the form of conflict between the *SC*, on the one hand, and the upper castes or the OBC, on the other.[9] Irrespective of the location of the caste-based conflict, its basic characteristics are the same: "whether caste clashes are social, economic, or political in nature, they are premised on the same basic principle [namely] any attempt to alter village customs or to demand land, increased wages, or political rights leads to violence and economic retaliation on the part of those most threatened by changes in the *status quo*." (Narula, 1999, p. 29-30). As Ram (2004) and Jodhka (2004) show, violence against the *SC* is an all-India phenomenon.

The genesis of – and, as we will show in this paper, the rise in – caste-related conflicts is best encapsulated by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes: "whenever the *SC* have tried to organise themselves or assert their rights, there has been a backlash from the feudal lords resulting in mass killings, gang rapes, looting and arsoning, etc. of *SC* hamlets."[10] As discussed in some detail later in this paper, there has been a rise in the assertiveness of persons belonging to India's lower castes, particularly the *SC*, large swathes of whom are no longer prepared to accept the subservient role that upper caste Hindus expect them to play and the polluting stigma that all Hindus

[8] In November 2012, 268 houses belonging to SC persons were burnt down in Dharamupuri in the state of Tamil Nadu when a *SC* boy eloped with a *Vanniyar* (most BC) girl.

[9] Sushmita (2014) writes that between 1976 and 2001, around 700 *Dalits* and backward caste people were killed in the state of Bihar by upper caste private armies and police. In an infamous incident in June 2012, the *Turu Kapus* (OBC) – including women and children - attacked the *Mala* (*Dalits*) in the village of Laxmipet, in Srikakulum district in Andhra Pradesh, killing four and seriously injuring several dozen (Hyderabad Political Economy Group, 2012). In Orissa, as Padhi *et. al.* (2012) report, violent incidents against *Dalits* occurs almost daily: most notably, on 22 January 2012, an entire *Dalit* hamlet comprising 45 families was burnt down in the village of Lathore; in February 2012, 22 Dalit families were burnt out of their homes in the village of Kamadhenukote; and in April 2012, a similar fate visited Dalit families in the village of Kalahandipada. Infamous acts of violence against *Dalits* have *inter alia* also occurred in Tamil Nadu (Senthalir, 2012); in Karnataka (Pinto, 1994); and in Haryana (EPW, 2010).

[10] National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, *Highlights of the Report of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the Years 1994-95 & 1995-96* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1997), p. 2.

assign to them. This rise in assertiveness has been aided by a growing realisation on the part of the lower castes that, through sheer numbers, they could, through appropriate political organisation, wield political power. To a significant extent they have succeeded in establishing powerful political parties which cater exclusively to their interests.

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to provide a quantitative assessment of caste-based conflict in India. The data for this paper is from the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) of 2006 encompassing 8,659 households in 242 villages in 18 Indian states. This survey, as it pertains to conflict and conflict resolution is described in some detail in the next section.

Using these data, we examine two broad issues

1. The sources of conflict in rural India and the degree to which these sources contribute to caste-basted, as opposed to non-caste-based conflict.
2. The sources of conflict resolution in rural India: are some conflict-resolving agencies more effective at dealing with caste-based conflicts and others more effective with non-caste-based conflicts?

The next section describes the data used and the subsequent sections proceed to answering each of these questions.

2. The Rural Economic and Demography Survey of 2006

The data for this paper is from the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey (REDS) of 2006 covering 18 states in India and encompassing 8,659 households in 242 villages in 18 Indian states and is described in Nagarajan *et. al.* (2015), chapter 5. The households were asked a number of questions relating to their economic and social characteristics (employment, occupation, land ownership, social and religious groupings) but also about issues relating to governance, voting, and – relevant for this paper - *conflict*.

Under the 'conflict questionnaire', heads of households (or their representative) in the villages were asked, against each of 11 proximate causes (detailed in Table 1), whether they had *observed* 'conflict' in their village. This questionnaire asked households to record conflicts that they had

observed by three time periods: the period of the current *panchayat* [village assembly or legislature]; the period of the previous *panchayat*; and the period of the previous to previous *panchayat*. Since the *panchayat* periods are not specifically defined, we assumed that they were of five years duration so that the current *panchayat* period refers to (approximately) 2001-2006 and the previous *panchayat* period refers to (approximately) 1996-2001, and the previous to previous period refers to approximately 1991-1995. Hereafter, these are referred to, respectively, as the 'current', the 'previous', and 'previous to previous' periods. The questionnaire administered to households, in respect of conflict observation, is reproduced below for the current *panchaya*t period: identical questions were asked with respect to the other periods.

Table 1: the Household Questionnaire

Sl.no.	Elections held	Conflicts Type	Did you observe this conflict in the village (1 = Yes; 2 = No)	If yes in column 5,			Did your household experience conflict of this type mentioned in column4?	Was your household involved in this conflict (1=Yes; 2=No)	What was the role of your household in this conflict?*	Did your household feel effect of this conflict (1=Yes; 2=No)
				Was it caste based? (1 = Yes; 2 = No)	Was it religion based? (1 = Yes; 2 = No)	No. of families involved				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Current panchayat period	Labour conflicts								
2		Sharing drinking water								
3		Sharing irrigation water								
4		Rent collection from share croppers and tenants								
5		Encroachment on public land								
6		Inter family disputes								
7		Political conflicts								

8		Dacoities								
9		Naxalite (Maoist)								
10		Large farmer & small farmer								
11		Farmer & worker								

*Role in conflict: Participant; Observer; Victim; Mediator; Arbitrator

The responses to the question in column 4 of Table 1 indicated that a total (over all the villages sampled) of: 19,997 conflicts were observed (by household heads) during the period of the current *panchayat*; 19,225 conflicts were observed during the previous *panchayat*; and 14,082 conflicts were observed during the *previous to previous panchayat*.

Table 2 tabulates the observed conflicts in Indian villages by the proximate cause of the conflict and by the three periods – those of the current *panchayat*, the previous *panchaya*t, and the previous to previous *panchayat* – in which they occurred. Of the conflicts observed during the period of the current *panchayat*, 33% was the result of inter-family disputes, nearly 20% was the result of disputes over the sharing of drinking water, 15% was the consequence of political disputes, and 10% was the result of labour disputes over wage payments. Thus, of the 11 proximate causes of disputes listed in Table 2, these four causes accounted for 78% of the observed disputes in the current period with the corresponding proportions being 79% and 80%, respectively, for the previous and previous to previous *panchayats*.

Table 2: Observed Conflicts in Indian Villages by Proximate Cause of Conflict

	Current *Panchayat*		**Previous *Panchayat***		**Previous to Previous *Panchayat***	
	Number	**% of total**	**Number**	**% of total**	**Number**	**% of total**
Labour conflicts (wage payments)	2,265	11.3	1,946	10.1	1,403	10.0
Sharing Drinking Water	3,830	19.2	3,431	17.9	2448	17.4
Sharing Irrigation Water	1,537	7.7	1,291	6.7	624.0	4.4
Rent Collection from share croppers	750	3.8	905	4.7	679	4.8
Encroachment on public land	866	4.3	909	4.7	697.0	5.0
Inter-family disputes	6,755	33.8	6,623	34.5	5,663	40.2
Political disputes	3,035	15.2	3,137	16.3	1792.0	12.7
Dacoities (Banditry)	111	0.6	176	0.9	68	0.5
Maoist Insurgencies	186	0.9	201	1.1	170.0	1.2

Large versus small farmer	196	1.0	199	1.0	170	1.2
Farmer versus worker	466	2.3	407	2.1	368	2.6
Total	19,997	100.0	19,225	100.0	14,082	100.0

It is important to point out that the household questionnaire did not ask a household to record its *experience* of a particular type of conflict, simply whether it had been observed. So, for example, one household might have observed labour conflicts on a regular basis, while another observed such a conflict as an isolated incident; however, both households could only record that they had observed such a conflict without being able to detail their respective experiences.

Lastly, it should be noted that a given household could observe more than one source of conflict: for example, household X could observe a conflict due to labour issues and another conflict relating to sharing drinking water. Consequently, the total number of observations could (and, generally, would) exceed the number of households recording these observations: in 2006, the 19,997 observations of conflict emanated from 8,112 households for an average of 2.47 observations per household of conflict (from different sources).

3. Caste-Based Conflict

Households, who had observed a conflict in the village, stemming from one or the other of the 11 sources of conflict listed in Table 1, were asked in column 5 of the 'conflict questionnaire' (reproduced in Table 1), if in their view it was 'caste-based' or 'religion-based': of the total of 19,997 conflicts observed in 2006, 2,455 (12%) were judged to be 'caste-based' and 537 (3%) were judged to be 'religion-based'. While both dimensions relate to *identity-based* conflict, we focus on *caste-based* conflict because that is the more predominant phenomenon in *rural* India.[11]

Table 3 shows that 2,455 of the total of 19,997 conflicts recorded in the current *panchayat* period (12%) were judged to be caste based, the corresponding proportions being 11% for the previous and the previous to previous *panchayats* (respectively, 2,107 out of 19,225 and 1,542 out of 14,082 conflicts). Table 3 also tabulates the proximate cause of caste based disputes. Now, the four main sources of conflict – labour, drinking water, inter-family, and political – accounted for 84% of

[11] Religious based conflict in India, predominantly between Hindus and Muslims, is an urban, rather than rural phenomenon mainly because most of India's Muslims are urban residents (see Varshney, 2002).

caste-based disputes in the current *panchaya*t period, the corresponding proportions being 82% and 83%, respectively, for the previous and previous to previous *panchayats*.

Table 3: Caste-Based Conflicts in Indian Villages, by Proximate Cause of Conflict

	Current *Panchayat*		**Previous *Panchayat***		**Previous to Previous *Panchayat***	
	Number	**% of total**	**Number**	**% of total**	**Number**	**% of total**
Labour conflicts (wage payments)	331	13.5	266	12.6	203	13.2
Sharing Drinking Water	550	22.4	382	18.1	321	20.8
Sharing Irrigation Water	159	6.5	110	5.2	51	3.3
Rent Collection from share croppers	87	3.5	109	5.2	77	5.0
Encroachment on public land	76	3.1	67	3.2	84	5.5
Inter-family disputes	712	29.0	625	29.7	571	37.0
Political disputes	471	19.2	452	21.5	179	11.6
Dacoities (Banditry)	19	0.8	21	1.0	7	0.5
Maoist Insurgencies	0	0.0	3	0.1	4	0.3
Large versus small farmer	20	0.8	13	0.6	9	0.6
Farmer versus worker	30	1.2	59	2.8	36	2.3
Total	2,455	100.0	2,107	100.0	1,542	100.0

Figure 1 shows, for each the four main roots of caste-based conflict – namely, labour, drinking water, inter-family, and political which, as noted earlier accounted for nearly 80% of *all* conflicts - the proportion of total conflicts that were caste-based for, respectively, the periods of the current, previous, and previous to previous *panchayats*. In the current period, for example, 14.7% of labour conflicts, 14.4 % of drinking water based conflicts, 10.6% of inter-family conflicts, and 16.6% of political conflicts were caste-based.

Figure 1: Caste-Based Conflicts as a Percentage of Total Conflicts

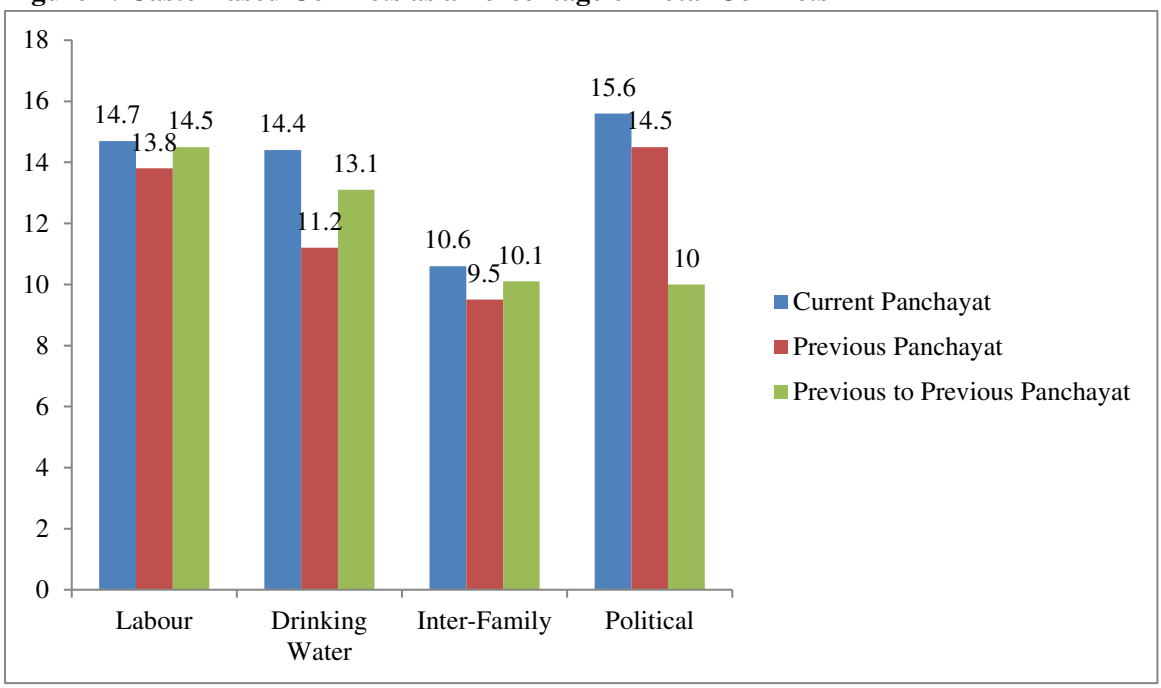


Figure 1 also clearly shows that the proportion of caste-based disputes, in the four sources of conflict, was higher in the period of the present *panchayat* – particularly with respect to political conflict – than in previous *panchayats*.

Attitudes to Caste through Vignettes

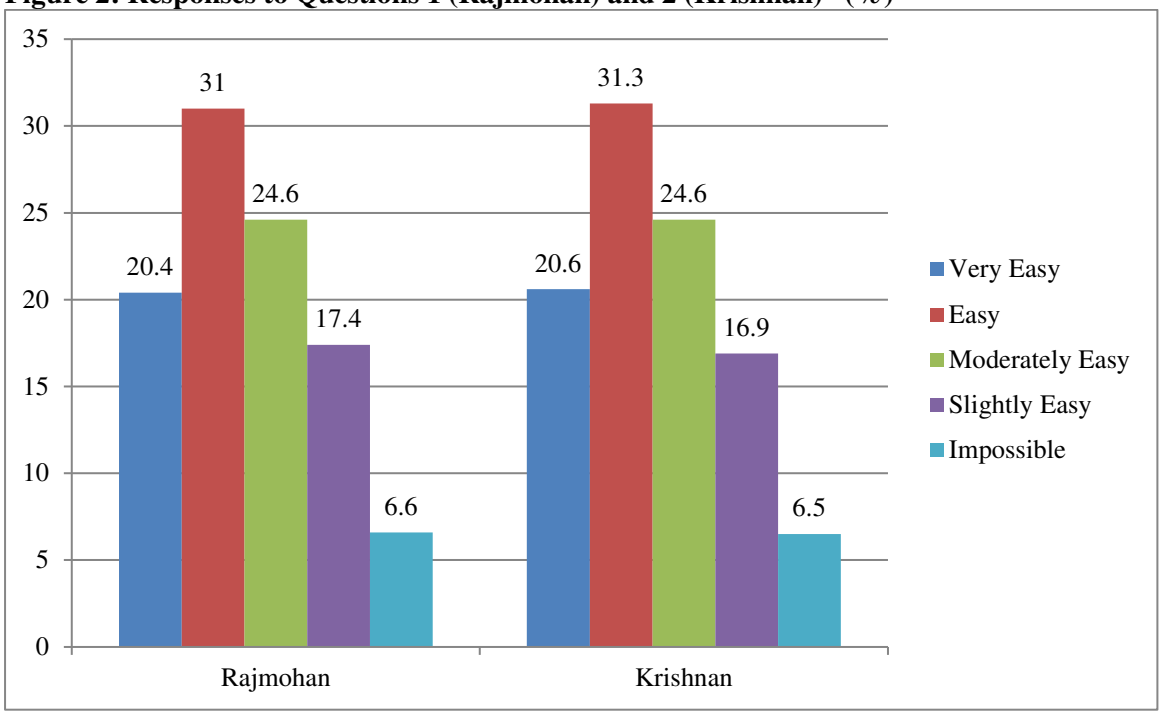
REDS was also able to explore the opinions of persons with respect to caste-related issues by seeking views about the salience of caste in different situations. We detail two situations below: the first relating to attitudes towards low caste, and the second relating to attitudes towards high caste, persons

Question 1: How easy is it for Rajmohan [a low caste person] to attend public and religious ceremonies in the village without attracting [adverse] attention to himself because of his caste?

Question 2: How easy is it for Krishnan [a Brahmin] to interact with people from other castes in the village?

Figure 2 shows the responses to these two questions in terms of the following categories: very easy; easy; moderately easy; slightly easy; impossible.

Figure 2: Responses to Questions 1 (Rajmohan) and 2 (Krishnan)* (%)



* 25,862 responses

The distribution of responses between the two questions was very similar. About 7% thought that it would be impossible for a lower caste person not to attract attention to himself at a public religious ceremony while 7% also thought that a Brahmin would find it impossible to interact with other castes in the village. In total about one in four respondents felt there would be some degree of difficulty on both accounts.

The root of the problem regarding the discomfort that lower and upper caste persons feel in each other's presence, as exemplified in the vignettes about Rajmohan and Krishnan, lies in the custom and practice of 'untouchability' according to which a lower caste person was 'unclean' and that, therefore, physical contact with such a person was polluting. After Independence, the Indian Constitution abolished 'untouchability' and made its practice an offence. This prohibition was strengthened by the Protection of Civil Rights Acts of 1955 and 1976 and the Prevention of Atrocities Acts of 1989 and 1995. Under the Protection of Civil Rights Acts of 1955 and 1976 many anti-*Dalit* actions became offences. These included *inter alia*: prohibiting entry into places of worship; denial of access to water; denial of access to public places; denial of goods and/or services. Yet,

notwithstanding these laws, it is untouchability more than anything else that is responsible for the denial of human rights to lower caste persons (Sainath , 2002).

An area of exclusion – which was underpinned by the gamut of issues associated with pollution and untouchability - was the Mid-day meal scheme which provided free lunch on school days for children in Primary and Upper Primary Classes in Government schools. Discrimination in mid-day meals took several forms: not serving them adequate amounts, making them wait till high caste children have finished their meal, throwing food into their plates so as to avoid any possibility of physical contact, seating them separately from higher caste children with separately marked plates, and not appointing any persons from the Scheduled Castes as cooks and helpers (Nambissan, 2010; Thorat and Lee, 2010).

Another area of contention associated with untouchability was water. In most schools in Rajasthan, children from the higher caste drank water and washed their plates before children from the lower castes and one school had separate water pitchers for SC pupils. The pattern of SC pupils having to wait their turn was repeated in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Furthermore, in Madhya Pradesh, only children from the higher castes were allowed to fetch water for the teachers and guests (Ramachandran and Naorem , 2013). Bros and Couttenier (2010) show that caste norms which prohibit the sharing of water between upper castes and *Dalits* are still vigorous and violently enforced while Tiwary (2006) argues that since 75% of *Dalit* households in rural areas depend on community sources (see Table 4), they are more subject to discrimination (such as, separate queues, extra waiting time, other's filling the buckets, etc.) and different forms of the practice of untouchability.

Table 4: The Access of Rural Households to Water

Caste	Exclusive Use (%)	Community Use (%)	Common Use (%)
Dalits	18	75	7
Other Backward Classes	27	64	10
Upper Castes	36	54	10

Source: Tiwary (2006), p. 102.

'Untouchable' casual labourers find it difficult to obtain many types of employment in the farm and non-farm sectors for example, jobs involving the harvesting of fruit and vegetables. Sellers from the SC of edible products - like milk, fruit, vegetables, and cooked food - find it difficult to find buyers. Thorat and Lee (2010) pointed out that there were also disparities in treatment with respect to the Public Distribution System (PDS) for food: it transpired that most of the government approved agents who ran PDS shops were from the higher castes and they offered preferential service to their own caste members.

4. Conflict Resolution

The household questionnaire also asked about conflict resolution and the 'conflict resolution questions' are set out for the current *panchayat* in Table 5. Identical questions were asked about the previous and previous to previous *panchayats*.

Table 5: Household Questionnaire on Conflict Resolution

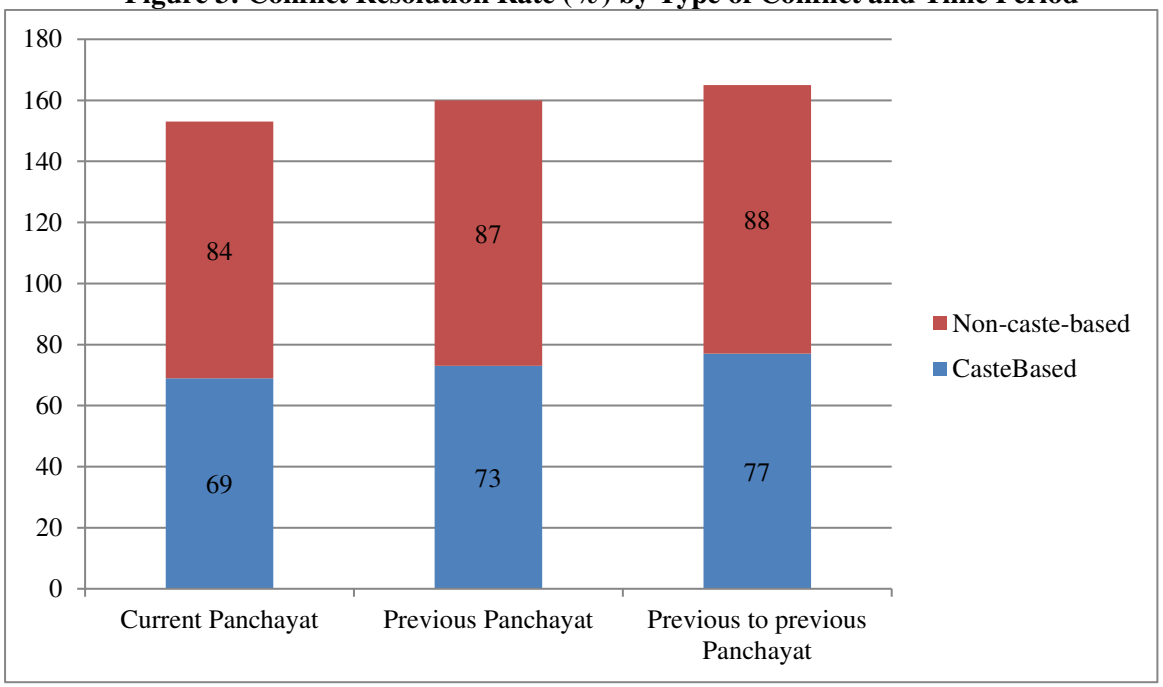
Sl.no.	Elections held	Panchayat code	Conflicts Type	Was the police called in to resolve the issue (1 = Yes; 2 = No)	Conflict status (1=ongoing; 2=resolved)	If resolved, Who resolved the conflict [**Use Code-73**]	Did you intervene to resolve the conflict (1 = Yes; 2 = No)
1	2	3	4	20	21	22	23
1	Current panchayat period	1	Labour (payment of wages)				
2		1	Sharing drinking water				
3		1	Sharing irrigation water				
4		1	Rent collection from share croppers and tenants				
5		1	Encroachment on public land				
6		1	Inter family disputes				
7		1	Political conflicts				
8		1	Dacoities				
9		1	Naxalite (Maoist)				
10		1	Large farmer & small farmer				

11		1	Farmer & worker				

Codes for Agency of Conflict Resolution 1=Court; 2=Traditional *Panchayats*; 3=Elected *Panchayats*; 4=Village headman; 5=Wealthy individual; 6=Other important village individual; 7=*Tehsildar*; 8=Magistrate; 9=Village government official; 10=Relatives; 11=Police

Most of the conflicts reported in the REDS had been resolved at the time the survey was conducted: the 'resolution rate' (RR) over all conflicts and over all time periods (current, previous, and previous to previous *panchayats*) was 84.6%. However, as Figure 3 shows, the RR varied according to the type of conflict (caste-based and non-caste-based) and the time period (current, previous, and previous to previous *panchayats*). For all three periods, the RR of caste-based conflicts was lower than that of non-caste-based conflicts and, for the current *panchayat*, at 69% to 84%, it was 15 pp lower. The RR declined for both types of conflict as one moved from the period furthest in time (the previous to previous *panchayat* period) to the present period but this probably reflected the healing effects of time.

Figure 3: Conflict Resolution Rate (%) by Type of Conflict and Time Period*



*Percentage of conflicts resolved by time of survey.

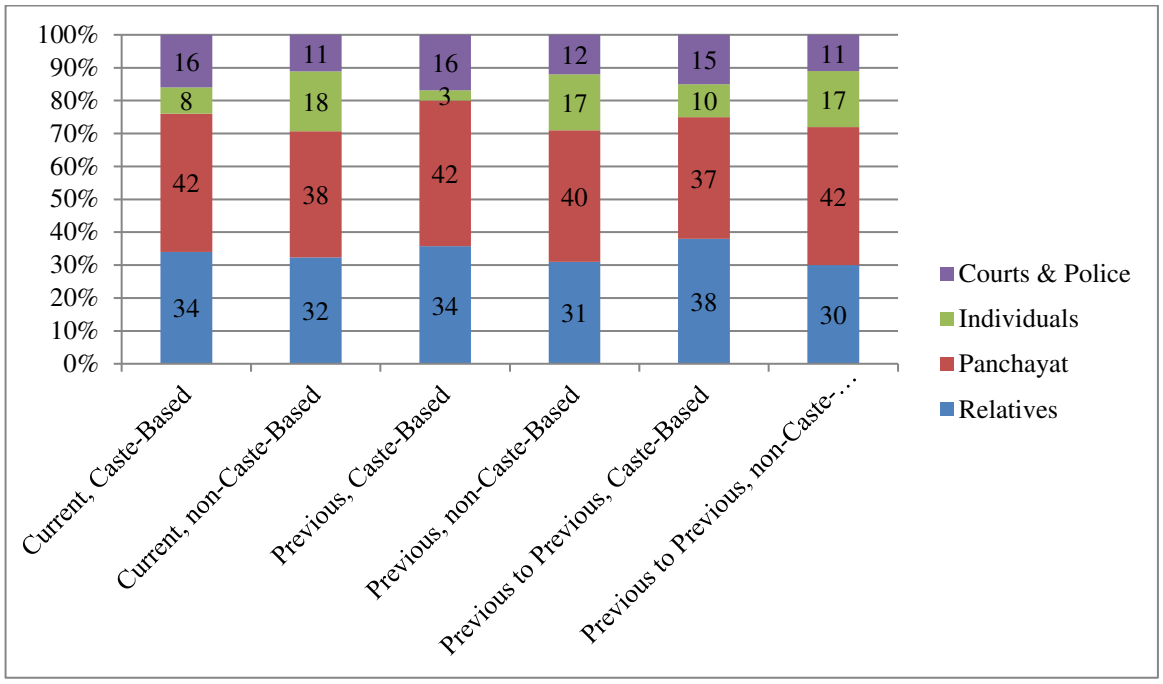
The REDS data listed 11 agents (listed in the note to Table 5) who were instrumental in resolving conflicts and from these we aggregated four main agents who, over all the periods, were responsible for resolving 97% of the resolved conflicts:

1. Resolution through the agency of relatives
2. Resolution through the agency of prominent individuals in the village

3. Village-level resolution through the agency of the *panchayat* or village assembly(either traditional or elected)

4. Resolution through the forces of law & order (courts and police).

Figure 4: Conflict Resolution Rate (%) by Resolving Agent, Type of Conflict, and Time Period*



*Percentage of Resolved Conflicts by Resolving Agent

Figure 4 shows that the share of the different agents in the number of resolved conflicts did not change much over time: for example, in each period, about 40% of caste-based conflicts were resolved by the *panchayat*. There were, however, significant differences in agent shares between caste and non-caste conflicts. Most notably, the police and the courts were relatively more important - and prominent individuals in the village were relatively less important - in resolving caste-based conflicts, compared to non-caste-based conflicts. This raises the further question of whether the probability of a particular agency resolving a conflict depended not just upon the nature of the conflict (caste versus non-caste), but also upon *inter alia* the household's caste group and level of education.

5. Estimation Results: Caste-Based Conflict

In this section we estimate an econometric model, based on a probit regression, in which the dependent variable, *y*, took the value 1 if household *i, i=1,…,N*, *observed* a conflict which it judged to be *caste-based* (that is, its answers to the questions in columns 4 and 5 of Table 1 were both 'yes') and zero if it was involved in a conflict which it judged to be *non-caste-based* (that is, its answers to the questions in columns 4 and 5 of Table 1 were, respectively 'yes' and 'no'). In essence, therefore, the probit model estimates the probability that a conflict, observed by a household, would be judged by it to be caste-based, *conditional* on the values of a number of factors set out below:[12]

1. The *source* of the conflict. In this context, we consider four sources – labour, drinking water, inter-family, and politics – since, as observed in section 3 these sources comprised over 80% of caste related conflicts.
2. The *time period* of the conflict. In this context, we consider two time periods: the period of the current *panchayat* and the period of the previous *panchayat*. Thus, we drop observations relating to the previous to previous *panchayat* because of the difficulty recalling, with any accuracy, events which occurred nearly 15 years ago.
3. The *caste group* to which the household belonged: Scheduled Castes (*SC),* Other Backward Classes (*OBC),* and Upper Castes (*UC*).
4. The household's *characteristics*. For the sake of parsimony, we take this as the *educational level* of the household head. These levels were: (i) illiterate; (ii) educated up to primary level; (iii) educated up to secondary level; (iv) educated up to higher secondary level or uncompleted college; (v) educated with a degree or higher.

Interaction effects were used to model whether the effect of one conditioning variable varied according to values of another variable. In the context of this study, a natural question to ask is whether the effect of the conditioning variables (source of conflict, household social group, and household education) on the likelihood of observing a caste-based conflict varied according to time

[12] In addition, there were controls for the states (there were 17 states covered by REDS) which took the form of categorical variables which took the value 1 if the respondent was from a particular state, 0 if he was he/she was not. Similarly, there were 241 villages in REDS and village fixed effects were captured by means of categorical variables which took the value 1 if the respondent was from a particular village, 0 if he was he/she was not. These fixed effects are not reported.

period. In order to answer this question we estimated a general model, on data for 21,593 household observations of conflicts that had occurred in their respective villages, in which the conflict source, social group, and education variables were allowed to interact with the current and previous time periods.

Probit (and logit) models are examples of generalised linear models such that, if *y* is the dependent variable which takes 1,0 values, and $x_1 \ldots x_K$ are *K* co-variates, and u is an error term then:

$$F(y) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 \ldots + \beta x_K + u \qquad (1)$$

In a *logit* model, the error term is assumed to follow a logistic distribution so that

$F(y) = \left[\frac{\Pr(y=1)}{1-\Pr(y=1)} \right]$ where Pr(*y=1*) is the probability that y takes the value 1. In a probit model, the error term is assumed to follow a normal distribution so that $F(y) = \Phi^{-1}[\Pr(y=1)]$, where Φ^{-1} is the cumulative standard normal distribution. This implies that $\Pr((y=1) = \Phi(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 \ldots + \beta x_K)$. In practice, there is little difference between the estimates obtained from logit and probit methods since the logistic and normal distributions are very similar.

Following the advice contained in Long and Freese (2014), the results from the estimated equation are presented in Table 3 in the form of the *predicted probabilities* from the estimated probit coefficients and not in terms of the estimates themselves. This is because the probit estimates themselves do not have a natural interpretation – they exist mainly as a basis for computing more meaningful statistics and, in this case, these are the predicted probabilities. Using these results we examined whether the average likelihood of conflicts, in which households were 'involved', being caste-based had changed significantly between the two periods.

The results from the estimated probit model (Table 6) show that, given that a conflict has been observed, the average probability - computed over all 21,593 household observations - of it being caste-based was 16.3 % in the present period (column 2) and 14.6% in the previous period (column 3).[13]. Dividing the difference in these probabilities (shown in column 4) by the standard error

[13] This prediction was based upon using the equation estimates, in conjunction with the *observed* values of the conditioning variables, to compute $Pr[y_i=1]$ for each household in the present and past periods and then to average over these predicted probabilities to obtain for, respectively, the present and past periods, the probability of observing a caste-based conflict as 16.3% and 14.6%

of the difference (column 5) yields the z value (column 6) for testing the null hypothesis that the two probabilities are the equal (that is, the difference is zero). The z-value of 3.83 rejects this hypothesis and the p-value in column 7 confirms this. Consequently, one can infer that the average probability of an observed conflict being caste-based conflict was significantly greater in the present, than in the past, period.

The results in Table 6 also allow comparisons to be made between the present and the past for: caste groups, sources of conflict, and educational levels. The likelihood for SC and OBC households of observed conflicts being caste-based went up from 15.5% and 14.1%, respectively, in the past period to 17.6% and 16.3%, respectively, in the present period. Both rises (of, respectively, 2.1 and 2.2 percentage points) were significantly different from zero. Similarly the likelihood of observed conflicts, that are sourced by sharing drinking water and inter-family disputes, being caste-based went up from 15.4% and 12.5% , respectively, in the past period to 19% and 13.7%, respectively, in the present period. Both rises (of, respectively, 3.6 and 1.2 percentage points) were significantly different from zero. In terms of education, the likelihood of educated (secondary education and above) households observing conflicts that were caste-based went up, for example for graduates, from 13.9% in the past period to 19.3% in the present period. This rise of 5.4 percentage points was significantly different from zero.

Table 6: Comparing the Probability of Caste Based Conflicts between Past and Present *Panchayat* Periods: 21,593 conflicts*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Conditioning Variable	Probability (Current)	Probability (Past)	Difference	SE of Difference	z value for H_0: Pr(current) = Pr(past)	Pr>|z|
Overall	0.163	0.146	0.016	0.004	3.83	0.00
Caste Group						
Scheduled Caste (SC)	0.176	0.155	0.021	0.010	2.02	0.04
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	0.163	0.141	0.022	0.006	3.68	0.00
Upper Castes (UC)	0.154	0.150	0.005	0.008	0.65	0.51
Source of Conflict						
Labour	0.159	0.149	0.010	0.012	0.81	0.42
Drinking Water	0.190	0.154	0.036	0.010	3.73	0.00
Inter-Family	0.137	0.125	0.012	0.006	1.94	0.05
Political	0.190	0.181	0.010	0.010	1.00	0.32
Education						
Illiterate	0.157	0.141	0.016	0.007	2.38	0.02
Primary	0.164	0.168	-0.004	0.009	-0.47	0.63

Secondary	0.155	0.135	0.020	0.009	2.20	0.03
Higher Secondary	0.184	0.143	0.042	0.014	3.07	0.00
Graduate or above	0.193	0.139	0.054	0.020	2.66	0.01

*Which households observed

6. The Rise of Caste-Based Conflict in India

The previous section showed very clearly that there was a rise in caste-based conflict over the (approximate) period 1996-2006. This begs the question of why this rise occurred. There are several reasons for the rise in caste-based conflict over the past two decades.

The first is the rise in assertiveness of persons belonging to India's lower castes who are less prepared to accept the subservient role that upper caste Hindus expect of them. In turn, this has generated resentment from upper-caste persons as they see traditional social relations, underpinned by lower-caste subservience, being eroded. The conjunction of lower caste demand for greater equality and upper caste reluctance to acquiesce to such demands then leads to conflict.

Chakraborty *et. al.* (2006) showed that anti-*Dalit* crimes were most frequent in areas characterised by upward mobility among *Dalits.* Their evidence suggests that violence is directed at relatively better off *Dalits* and, to that extent, atrocities are a response of upper-caste Hindu society to *Dalit* mobility. Not only are anti-*Dalit* crimes directed at better off *Dalits*, but they tend to be most frequent in districts in which the proportion of *Dalits* in the population is higher than the national average (16.2%).

The EPW (2014) notes, rising caste conflict is part of "a growing trend wherein *Dalit* youth, particularly those who are educated and ignore 'their place' in the social hierarchy by attempting to interact with women from the so called higher castes, are targeted with incredible cruelty".[14] Several so called inter-family conflicts have been triggered by inter-caste marriages between *Dalit* men and upper caste women. The *Hindustan Times* reported on15 April 2013 that "agitated after the recent elopement and marriage of a Dalit man with a woman from the landowning *Ror* community of the

[14] In other states, particularly Bihar and Jharkhand, *Dalit* assertiveness is conflated with Maoist (known in India as 'Naxalites') armed activity against the established ruling classes. The response from the latter is to form private armies (most prominently, the *Bhoomi Sena* and the *Ranvir Sena*) to attack *Dalits* on the pretext that their assertiveness is simply a camouflage for Naxailte activity. These private armies were aided by the state governments through being issued with licences for arms and ammunition (Sushmita, 2014).

same village, a 400-strong mob barged into the [Dalit] settlement and not only ransacked houses and shops but also damaged the locality's water tanks and six bore-wells, besides injuring three persons."[15] The *India Today* newspaper reported that following the marriage of a Dalit boy and an upper caste girl in the state of Tamil Nadu, a mob of over 1,500 people entered the Dalit Colony on 7 November 2012 and ransacked houses making 300 families homeless.[16]

Many of these sources of violence have to do with the growing confidence of the lower castes in (a) their willingness to see upper caste women as potential spouses, a willingness that might have been unthinkable a few decades ago and (ii) their refusal to be routinely humiliated in the use of public goods, humiliations that they might have accepted without question in the past. And, to a great extent, the growing assertiveness of the lower castes has come with the realisation that, in a democracy, their numbers give them political clout.

In the last 20 years Indian politics has changed in important ways. Perhaps the most dramatic has been the fragmentation of politics as the lower castes have left the Congress party's upper-caste dominated 'big tent' to set up their own parties in opposition to the Congress. As Jodhka (2012) observes, there is a weakening of traditional caste relations based on status and hierarchy and this has been facilitated by India's lower classes rising to challenge, at the ballot box, the traditional political hegemony of India's upper castes.

Jaffrelot (2003) has examined India's "silent revolution" through which lower-status groups have increasingly captured political office and used political power to alter the balance of power between the upper and the lower castes in the countryside. Foremost among these lower caste groups – who originally were mobilised by the upper caste Congress Party but who now mobilised themselves *against* the Congress – were the *OBC*. These were castes that were not forward – in the sense of belonging to the Brahmin, Kshatriya, or Vaishya *varnas* – but who, unlike the *SC*, were not considered 'untouchable'. In the context of Indian politics, the *OBC* is a useful electoral category

[15] http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/dalit-locality-attacked-water-supply-cut-after-inter-caste-marriage-in-haryana/article1-1044879.aspx (accessed 21 July 2015).
[16] http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/inter-caste-marriage-violence-tamil-nadu-vanniers-dalits/1/234837.html (accessed 21 July 2015).

encapsulating the lower castes *above the pollution line* who have tried, by voting along caste lines, to carve out a political space for themselves.

Next to follow were castes that were below the pollution line and their chosen political vehicle was the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) which is led by a Dalit woman, Mayawati who has been four times Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh – India's largest and most populous states. In this state power has alternated between the *Samajwadi* Party (whose support is anchored among the Other Backward Classes and Muslims) and the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (whose support is anchored among the *SC*). As a general rule, whenever one party forms the government in Uttar Pradesh, groups supporting the other party lose out.

In this political see-saw both lower caste groups have benefited from political favours. Favours to one's supporters took essentially two forms: the provision of local public goods targeted at particular groups, say a paved road or a school in a locality in which people from a group were concentrated; the provision of private benefits to targeted groups of (usually poor) voters, often in the form of cash payments or gifts in kind like cycles, sewing machines, and illegally supplying below poverty line (BPL) cards to voters who do not qualify for these (Breeding, 2011). The general phenomenon underlying these developments has been the rise of caste-based parties who come to power by drawing on the votes of the (lower) castes supporting them (Chandra, 2004).

7. Estimation Results: Conflict Resolution

The discussion of conflict resolution in section 4 raised the question of whether the probability of a particular agency resolving a conflict depended not just upon the nature of the conflict (caste versus non-caste), but also upon *inter alia* the household's caste group and level of education. This section answers this question by estimating an ordered logit model in which the dependent variable took the values: 1, if the conflict was resolved through relatives; 2, if the resolving agency was prominent individuals; 3, if the *panchayat* was the resolving agency; and 4, if the conflict was resolved by the police and/or law courts.[17]

[17] The logic of the ordering was persons who were relatives; persons who were not relatives; elected institutions; non-elected institutions with the power of coercion.

The ordered logit model was estimated conditional on the values of a number of conditioning factors set out at the beginning of section 5, namely, the source of the conflict; household caste group, and household education level. *Interaction effects* were used to model whether the effects of the conditioning variables (conflict source, household social group, and household education) on the likelihood of resolving a conflict, through a particular agency, varied according to whether it was a caste-based or a non-caste-based conflict. In order to answer this question we estimated a general model in which the conditioning variables were allowed to interact with a variable which took the value 1 if a conflict was caste-based, 0 if it was not.

Table 7: Probabilities of Households Using Different Types of Agents to Resolve Conflicts: 21,483 Resolved Conflicts

1	2	3		4	5	6
Conflict Resolved by:	Probability (Caste-Based)	Probability (non-Caste Based)	Difference	SE of Difference	z value for H_0: Pr(caste) = Pr(non-caste)	Pr>|z|
Relatives	0.158	0.213	-0.056	0.007	-7.580	0.00
Individuals	0.378	0.389	-0.012	0.004	-2.810	0.01
Panchayat	0.305	0.264	0.042	0.028	1.500	0.13
Courts & Police	0.159	0.134	0.026	0.007	3.740	0.00

Table 7 shows the probabilities that caste-based and non-caste based conflicts were resolved by each of the four agents: relatives, individuals, *panchayats*, and courts and police. So, Table 7 shows that, for caste-based [non-caste-based] conflicts, 15.8% [21.3%] were resolved by relatives, 37.8% [38.9%] by individuals, 30.5% [26.4%] by *panchayats*, and 15.9% 13.4%] by the courts and police.[18]

The most important finding in Table 7 is the importance of *panchayats* and prominent individuals in resolving village conflicts: 69% of caste-based, and 65% of non-caste based, conflicts were resolved by one or the other of these two agents. The second finding of note is that *panchayats* played a significantly larger role in resolving caste-based, compared to non-caste based conflicts while relatives played a significantly larger role in resolving non-caste-based, compared to caste-based conflicts. There was, thus a clear divide between caste-based and non-caste based conflicts in terms of the agency used to resolve conflicts: the latter relied on relatives and the *panchayats* while the former relied on individuals and the law.

8. Conclusions

Although caste-based conflict has been presented in the literature as between upper castes and the *SC* it could also be between the (non-*SC*) backward classes and the *SC* or between the upper castes and the (non-*SC*) backward classes. Competition for land and reserved places in educational institutions and jobs mean that the non-*SC* backward classes and the *SC* often clash; the rise of India's lower castes (Jaffrelot, 2003) has meant that conflict between India's upper and lower castes is on the

[18] Note that the probabilities sum to 1 over the rows in the second and third columns.

increase. Furthermore, compared to non-caste-based conflicts, caste-based conflicts entail greater loss of life and property and, as we have shown, they require the services of different agencies for their resolution.

The question is whether caste-based conflicts will become a permanent feature of life in rural India. According to one of India's towering intellects and greatest leaders, Bhim Rao (B.R.) Ambedkar (1891-1956), the caste system was a system by which some groups of persons, *using the justification of religion practice and belief*, exploited for economic ends, other groups of persons. Religious sanctity was used to restrict occupational choice, access to learning, access to places of worship, access to public spaces and public goods, and to extract cheap labour to perform menial/dirty/ dangerous jobs. In Ambedkar's own words: "The centre of the ideal [of Hinduism] is neither individual nor society. It is a class; it is a class of supermen called Brahmins; anything which serves the interests of this class is, alone, entitled to be called good" (Ambedkar, 1987, p. 72). In serving this class of 'supermen', he adds: "The Hindus are the only people in the world whose economic order – the relation of workman to workman – is consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal, and inviolate" (Ambedkar, 1987, p. 129).

Ambedkar drew attention to the appalling denial of civil, social, and economic rights to untouchables and demanded 'citizenship rights' for untouchables accompanied by legal safeguards against the violation of rights and policies for empowering untouchables by compensating them for the historical abuse of their rights (Thorat and Kumar, 2008). Today these views have culminated in, firstly, a substantial number of *SC* persons leaving Hinduism to become Buddhists and secondly, efforts by the Indian government to correct historical wrongs by a policy of reserving places in education, employment, and legislatures.

However, 'reservation policies' have exacerbated tensions between those included in, and those left out from, the reservation net; more unexpectedly, tensions have grown between those who were the *original* beneficiaries of the reservation policy (the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) and those who, under the terms of the 1980 Mandal Commission's Report, were *recent*

beneficiaries (the OBC). So much so, that it may be claimed, without too much exaggeration, that today the sharpest animosities, and the keenest rivalries, in India exist between the OBC and *SC*.

Groups which live on the margins of Indian society – Muslims, the Scheduled Castes, and the Scheduled Tribes – face three kinds of difficulty. First, in the context of the market they face issues of access (for example, not being to obtain jobs or housing) or disparity (for example, having to accept lower wages or only being offered certain kinds of jobs or housing). This then leads to the general problem of a lack of representation of certain groups in important areas of economic/political activity. Second, in the context of common property resources, they face the problem of dominant groups 'privatising' these resources through violence and converting them into resources over which they exercise 'ownership' and control (for example, in terms of access to common property resources like water and forests). Consequently, marginalised groups are bullied and intimidated into having to wait their turn to use common property resources. Thirdly, public policy initiatives which are meant to confer universal benefits are 'captured' by dominant groups – often acting in concert with those responsible for delivering these schemes – who then cream off most of the benefits.

Looking into the future, therefore, the social inclusion of marginalised groups depends upon redressing all the above three problems. The Hindu social order needs reform. This reformation might preserve the caste system but it must sweep away the concept and practice of untouchability and with it the attendant notion that certain occupations are so 'unclean' that they pollute not only those who work in these but also their progeny. Instead, Hindus should embrace the idea that all persons are equal before the law. Otherwise, the growing assertiveness of the lower castes will always cause them to ask - in the words of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* – "and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

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Appendix
Probit Estimates from which the results of Table 6 were derived

	Coefficient	Standard Error	z-value
Source of Conflict			
Labour	0.031	0.065	0.5
Drinking Water	-0.149	0.060	-2.5
Inter-Family	0.172	0.063	2.7
Political [R]			
Period			
Current	0.192	0.131	1.5
Past [R]			
Interaction: Source × Current			
Labour	0.133	0.085	1.6
Drinking Water	0.020	0.078	0.3
Inter-Family	-0.006	0.084	-0.1
Caste Group			
Scheduled Caste (SC)	0.030	0.056	0.5
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	-0.049	0.047	-1.1
Upper Castes (UC) [R]			
Interaction: Group × Current			
Scheduled Caste	0.085	0.071	1.2
Other Backward Classes	0.098	0.055	1.8
Education			
Illiterate	0.015	0.090	0.2
Primary	0.164	0.093	1.8
Secondary	-0.024	0.094	-0.3
Higher Secondary	0.022	0.100	0.2
Graduate or above [R]			
Interaction: Education × Current			
Illiterate	-0.203	0.118	-1.7
Primary	-0.317	0.122	-2.6
Secondary	-0.176	0.123	-1.4
Higher Secondary	-0.067	0.133	-0.5

Number of observations = 21,593; LR chi2(199) = 4812.08
Log likelihood = -6913.6193; Pseudo R2 = 0.2582
[R] denotes reference category